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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of gender in young children's teasing and bullying behavior. Observations and interviews were conducted with children in K-3 public school classrooms in urban and suburban locales with racially, ethnically, and economically diverse student bodies. The observations documented the gender of initiators and recipients, the nature of initiator and recipient behavior, and the responses of the teachers and adults present. Individual interviews were conducted with at least three children from each of the 25 classrooms included in the study. In the observed incidents, boys initiated three times as many incidents as girls; boys and girls were equally likely to be recipients; physical behavior predominated over verbal regardless of the gender of the initiator; among recipients boys were more physical and girls were more verbal in their responses to boy initiators; and although adults were always present, there was a consistent lack of adult intervention. In interviews with children, their perceptions about the gender of initiators and about the lack of intervention were in keeping with the observation results, and they expressed a unanimous desire for adults to intervene. The educational implications point to the important role that early elementary classroom teachers as well as parents need to play in helping to change the school environment so that teasing and bullying are not so prevalent. Teachers and other school staff as well as parents can be trained to take a proactive stance that will affect what children learn about "acceptable" gender roles in school settings and beyond. (Contains 29 references and 5 figures.) (Author/GCP)

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THE ROLE OF GENDER IN YOUNG CHILDREN'S TEASING AND BULLYING BEHAVIOR

Presented at the American Educational Research Association
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of gender in young children's teasing and bullying behavior. Observations and interviews were conducted with children in K-3 public school classrooms in urban and suburban locales with racially, ethnically, and economically diverse student bodies. The observations documented: the gender of initiators and recipients, the nature of initiator and recipient behavior, and the responses of the teachers and other adults present. Individual interviews were conducted with at least three children from each of 25 classrooms included in the study.

In the observed incidents, boys initiated three times as many incidents as girls; boys and girls were equally likely to be recipients; physical behavior predominated over verbal behavior regardless of the gender of the initiator; among recipients boys were more physical and girls were more verbal in their responses to boy initiators; and although adults were always present, there was a consistent lack of adult intervention. In interviews with children, their perceptions about the gender of initiators and about the lack of teacher intervention was in keeping with the observation results, and they expressed a unanimous desire for adults to intervene.

The educational implications point to the important role that early elementary classroom teachers as well as parents need to play in helping to change the school environment so that teasing and bullying are not so prevalent. Children need to see adults as active participants in abating teasing and bullying rather than appearing to condone such incidents through a failure to intervene. Teachers and other school staff (administrators, paraprofessionals, school aides) as well as parents can be trained to take a proactive stance that will affect what children learn about "acceptable" gender roles in school settings and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

Because of its serious nature and potential harm (both short- and long-term) to children, there has been a growing interest in studying the phenomenon of teasing and bullying. Researchers and educators alike agree that bullying can create a climate of fear that negatively affects teachers' ability to teach and children's ability to learn (Ross, 1996). Much of the research, however, has been conducted through the use of self-reports that are most appropriate for use with upper elementary and older students. The manner in which teasing and bullying are manifested in the early elementary classroom has not been fully examined. Also, while gender differences in regard to bullying have been reported (Ross, 1996), the role of gender in such behavior--especially in young children-- has not been a focus.

The study reported in this article was undertaken in order to better understand the roots of teasing and bullying and to specifically explore the role of gender in this behavior when children's emerging understanding of gender roles is being constructed (Kohlberg, 1966). The study examines the role that gender plays in teasing and bullying behavior in children ages five through eight in school settings. In addition, it explores the critical question of how teachers respond to teasing and bullying behavior in young children and what messages children may receive from those responses. The focus was on the phenomenon of teasing and bullying in school settings, not on individual children's behavior. In order to be age appropriate, the methodology incorporated observational data in addition to self-reports. In one of the four schools included in the study, staff and parent surveys were also conducted.

The study explored the following questions: 1) What role does gender play in teasing and bullying in early elementary (K-3) classrooms? 2) How do teachers and other adults respond to teasing and bullying when they occur? 3) What are children's perceptions about the role of gender in recollected incidents of teasing and bullying? 4) What are the implications for curriculum in the early elementary grades?

RELATED LITERATURE

A substantial body of research has been conducted on teasing and bullying in Europe (Olweus, 1993; Corbett, Gentry & Pearson, 1993; Mooney, Creeser & Blatchford, 1991; Rigby & Slee, 1991; Whitney & Smith, 1993; Ahmad & Smith, 1994), Canada (Charach, Pepler & Ziegler, 1995), and the United States (Hazler, Hoover & Oliver, 1991: Hoover, Oliver & Thomson, 1993). There is evidence that at least 15 percent of all children are involved in bullying incidents at some point in elementary and junior high school (Olweus, 1993). School is without doubt where most bullying occurs, and at school most bullying happens in locations where there is less adult supervision (Olweus, 1993).

Teachers' attitudes and behaviors play a major role in determining the extent of teasing and bullying in a classroom or a school (Olweus, 1994, p. 1178). While the literature documenting this behavior is not extensive, the information that does exist suggests that teachers fail to intervene in ways that students find helpful. Teachers and aides are often amused by sexual teasing behavior (Thorne & Luria, 1986), or condone

and trivialize it (Stein, 1995), and students report that teachers do relatively little to put a stop to it (Olweus, 1993).

In regard to gender differences, Ross reports that one of the most consistent findings throughout the literature concerns the higher incidence of bullying in boys than in girls (1996, p. 34). Boys are more frequently victims of physical violence and other overt, direct forms of bullying. Girls, however, experience more teasing and exclusionary forms of bullying sometimes labeled as covert and indirect, than boys do (Olweus, 1993).

While there is not a body of research investigating teasing and bullying at the early childhood level, there is a body of literature on sex differences in aggressive behavior that predates the more recent interest in teasing and bullying. This literature is in agreement with the research on teasing and bullying in its finding that aggressive behavior is more prevalent among boys (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Parke & Slaby, 1983). More recently, Bjorkqvist argues that when indirect aggression is taken into account, it is inaccurate to claim that boys are more aggressive than girls (1994).

A prevailing definition of bullying is exposure, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions (words, physical contact, making faces, gesturing, or intentional exclusion from a group) on the part of one or more other students (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). Researchers also feel that children can be harmed by occasional incidents of bullying (Tattum, 1989; Stephenson & Smith, 1989). Another factor involves a physical or psychological imbalance of power (Ross, 1996). However, Smith & Thompson (1991) found that children do not require that there be an imbalance of power in order to define it as bullying (Ross, p. 28).

METHOD

The current study was undertaken with a broad operational definition of teasing and bullying. For our purposes, teasing and bullying was any incident in which a child or children initiated direct and unprovoked physical and/or verbal behaviors to intimidate, make fun of, exclude, or interfere with what another child or children were doing. This definition, which does not distinguish teasing from bullying, was selected intentionally to avoid forcing observers to make on-the-spot judgments about subtle distinctions in behavior. Furthermore, we regard teasing and bullying as milder and more severe forms of behaviors existing along the same continuum. Because the focus of this study is on incidents rather than individual children, it seems plausible that an incident can be perceived as teasing or bullying regardless of whether the recipient has been teased or bullied before. We chose, therefore, to accept a definition in which a single isolated incident as well as episodic, frequent, and continual incidents could be included.

In our investigation, we documented the gender of initiators and recipients involved in incidents of teasing and bullying; whether the children's behavior was physical, verbal, or a combination of both; and the responses of the teachers and other adults present. We made special note when, in the process of teasing and bullying, explicit reference was made to gender and/or explicit reference was made to sex or sexuality.

The study was designed to look at the phenomenon of teasing and bullying within

the school setting in a naturalistic way. Direct observations in grades K-3 were aimed at documenting such incidents as they occurred, in order to later examine their gender content rather than focussing on individual pathology, i.e., identifying individual children who repeatedly provoke incidents and following these children exclusively. It also examined the perceptions of children and adults about teasing and bullying and the role that gender plays.

Four primary objectives of the study were: 1) To examine the gender content of teasing and bullying, specifically at the early childhood level (grades K-3) through direct observations; 2) To document how teachers and other adults respond to teasing and bullying; 3) To examine the gender content of children's recollections about incidents of teasing and bullying as well as their perceptions about teacher involvement; and 4) To consider the implications for curriculum development as well as teacher training, parent education, and school-wide policy.

Data Sources

We realize that, in addition to gender, there are other perceived differences that can be important factors in teasing and bullying such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, disability, language, immigrant status, religion. Even though these factors were not the focus of our study, we wanted to include a diverse population of children without associating teasing and bullying behavior with any particular group.

The four schools included in the study were in two different geographic locations. One was an urban public elementary school with a racially, culturally, and economically diverse student population and an almost equal mix of African-American, Latino/Latina, and Caucasian students. The three other schools were located in a large, suburban school system with an economically mixed population which was predominantly Caucasian but with a substantial percentage of Portuguese and Hispanic people whose first language was not English. In both locations, children with disabilities were integrated into general classrooms.

Observations were conducted in a total of 25 classrooms in the four schools included in the study. Six kindergarten, second- and third-grade classrooms, and seven first-grade classrooms, were included. In each classroom, there was an almost equal number of boys and girls. The teachers and other adults present when the observations occurred represented the gender division typically found in elementary schools. Eighty-four percent were female and 16% were male.

Individual interviews were conducted with a minimum of three children from each of the classrooms included in the study. This was done in order to examine the relationship between what was observed and children's perceptions about teasing and bullying and the role that teachers play in these events. Children were selected in order to achieve a representative and balanced sample and to achieve as much diversity as possible, i.e., to select initiators and recipients from the observed incidents, to include an equal number of boys and girls, and to reflect the racial/ethnic diversity of the classroom.

In the urban school included in the study, staff and parents were asked to respond to surveys on the phenomenon of teasing and bullying. In order to guarantee confidentiality, responses were anonymous.

Procedures

A racially and ethnically diverse team of Research Assistants, all of whom were female, were trained to conduct the observational phase of the study and to conduct individual interviews with a sample of children from the classes in which children were observed.

The observation protocol, developed during an earlier pilot phase of the study, was used to train the observers prior to actual data collection. In the training sessions, the observers watched videotaped early childhood classroom episodes that included incidents of teasing and bullying. They then wrote detailed objective descriptions of what they saw and used the coding categories in the observation protocol to analyze their notes in regard to the content of incidents of teasing and bullying. Points of disagreement in using the coding categories were discussed and resolved through consensus during the training sessions.

During the data collection phase of the study, each class was observed twice in order to document incidents of teasing and bullying throughout the school day. On one day, observers began when children arrived in the morning and continued until they arrived in the location where they would eat lunch. On a separate day, they began as children congregated in the lunch location to go to recess, which typically occurred in the outdoor playground except during inclement weather, and continued back in the classroom until dismissal. This made it possible to observe and document incidents that occurred in settings besides the classroom, e.g., hallways, the cafeteria, the playground.

The protocol called for the observers to alternate between two observation methods, the child sample and the event sample. In the child sample method, an individual child was observed for 15 minutes, and detailed objective notes were written regarding the physical and verbal behavior of that child and anyone who interacted with the child during that time period. Observers were instructed to alternately select boys and girls and to reflect the racial/ethnic diversity of the classroom in their selection. In the event sample method, the observer watched the class for a thirty-minute period and recorded in as much detail as possible the physical and verbal behavior of initiators, recipients, and adults for each incident of teasing and bullying that occurred.

The child sample method was included to ensure objectivity in obtaining a balanced sampling of boys and girls. The event sample method was included in order to be sure to capture incidents of teasing and bullying that might not involve children being followed during the child sample observations.

All incidents that fit the working definition of teasing and bullying were coded by the observers as soon as possible after the observation period was finished. The coding categories, developed during the pilot phase of the study, focused on salient information including: the gender of initiators and recipients; the nature of the behavior of all those involved (physical and/or verbal; gender explicit and/or sexual); the responses, if any, of the teachers and other adults present (ignore or remain otherwise uninvolved; become involved in some way, e.g., mediate, punish).

Inter-observer reliability was examined. Two pairs of observers went to the field and simultaneously observed in the same classrooms. They recorded and coded their notes without consultation in order to obtain some, although limited, information about inter-observer reliability. For each pair, one event sample and one child sample recorded during simultaneous time frames were analyzed. For each method of observing,

both pairs independently recorded exactly the same incidents. The rate of agreement between the two observers, when they independently coded their own notes of the same incidents, was 92%.

Inter-rater reliability was also established on 10% of the incidents of teasing and bullying that were included in the data analysis. The field notes of the observer were coded by a second coder, who had not observed the recorded incident. The rate of agreement between the observer and the second coder was 91%.

The interviews with children were conducted in locations within or outside the classroom that would afford a sense of privacy. Children were reassured that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions and that their responses would be kept private. The interviews began with an open-ended question, "What kinds of things do kids do to other kids in your school?" If the response did not describe an incident of teasing and bullying, the child was then asked, "Do kids ever tease or bully each other?" If details about described incidents of teasing and bullying were not spontaneously offered, the interviewer probed further with the following questions:

- Do things like that happen when adults are looking?
- What do you think the kids should do?
- What would you like adults to do?

The interviews were tape recorded so that the interviewers could focus on the questions and responses without being distracted by writing. As soon as possible after each interview was completed, the interviewer listened to and coded the tape. The coding categories, which were aligned with those for analyzing the classroom observations, focused on salient information related to the research objectives, including: the gender of initiators and recipients; the nature of the behavior of all those involved (physical, verbal, gender, explicit, sexual); whether or not teachers were perceived to be looking when the incident occurred; and what they thought teachers should do to handle such incidents.

As a follow-up to the observations and interviews with children, surveys were distributed in the one school in the urban location in order to examine staff and parent perceptions about teasing and bullying in schools and the role that gender plays. Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they saw teasing and bullying as a problem at the school and indicate if they perceived that gender and other kinds of differences (such as race, ethnicity, disability, physical differences such as height, weight, participation in the dual language program at the school, immigrant status) played a role in such incidents. Parent surveys were distributed through classroom teachers and directly to parents by standing at entrances to the school during arrival and departure times on two different days. The staff surveys were distributed in meetings and mailbox deposits and collected in a box left in the school office. Surveys distributed in the urban school yielded a total of 30 staff responses (approximately 50% of the entire staff of administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals and school aides) and 96 parent responses (approximately 13% of the parent body).

RESULTS

Gender Content of Direct Forms of Teasing and Bullying

Although 321 incidents of teasing and bullying were recorded by the observers, 90 of these were excluded from analysis because the initiators or recipients were mixed-gender groups, which obfuscates gender as a variable. In the remaining 231 incidents (72% of the total number recorded), there was only one initiator or recipient or, when there was more than one, they were of the same gender. These incidents were used in analyzing the observation data for gender content.

Boys were the initiators of 78% of the analyzed incidents of teasing and bullying, that is three times as often as girls, a gender difference that was significant, $Z = 10.3$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 1). It is not known to what extent the same children repeatedly acted as initiators of separate events because the individual identity of participants was deliberately omitted, as noted earlier.

Boys and girls were equally likely to be recipients, with boys in this role in 52% and girls in 48% of the incidents (see Figure 2). This remained the case regardless of the gender of the initiators. Boys initiated 41% of the total of 231 incidents against boys and 37% against girls; girls initiated 11% against boys and 11% against girls.

Gender proportions of initiators and recipients in the child and event samples were also compared in order to determine if observer bias played a role in the event samples, where observers might have, for example, chosen to record incidents initiated by boys over incidents initiated by girls. In the child samples, that option did not exist because they were required to record any incident involving the individual child who was the focus of observation, and gender was alternated in selecting children to follow. The gender proportions were found to be very similar regardless of method of observation. In the child sample ($N=75$), boys initiated 36% of the incidents against boys and 37% against girls; girls initiated 11% against boys and 16% against girls. In the event sample ($N=156$), boys initiated 44% of the incidents against boys and 37% against girls; girls initiated 11%of the incidents against boys and 8% against girls.

The behavior of initiators and recipients was analyzed in terms of whether it was physical, verbal, or a combination of both. Examples of physical behavior of initiators included hitting, pushing, pulling, touching inappropriately. Examples of physical behavior of recipients included hitting, pushing, pulling, as well as less aggressive responses like moving away or shaking the head to indicate "No." An example of an initiator's verbal behavior was saying, "You're an animal," to another child. An example of a verbal response from a recipient was a child saying, "Stop it," in an incident initiated by another.

The behavior of initiators was codable in 226 of the 231 analyzed incidents. Among male initiators, physical behavior predominated over verbal behavior or a combination of both, $X2 = 45.6$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$. Physical behavior also predominated among female initiators, $X\ 2 = 12.9$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 3). Since it was conceivable that when using the event sampling method, observers might more readily notice and record incidents involving physical behavior and that might account for this difference on the part of initiators, we examined the behavior of initiators separately for the two different methods of observation. Physical behavior for both male and female

initiators still predominated over verbal behavior, but the sample sizes were too small to test for significance.

Among recipients, the frequency of boys' physical responses (20%), verbal responses (18%), or combination of both (15%) were found to be comparable. There was a tendency for girls responses to be more frequently verbal (21%) than physical (11%) or a combination (15%), but this difference was not significant.

However, when the gender of initiators was considered in examining recipient responses, an interesting difference emerged. In incidents initiated by boys, boys' responses were predominantly physical while girls' responses were predominantly verbal, $\underline{X}=7.2$, df $=1$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 4). There were too few codable responses in incidents initiated by girls to come to any conclusion about gender differences.

A very small number of the incidents (26) were gender-explicit or sexual in nature. For example, in one gender-explicit incident, a boy with birthday cupcakes said to a second boy, "Only tomboys and boys get these." The second boy pointed to a third boy and said, "He's a tomgirl so he doesn't get any." In an incident coded as sexual, a boy rubbed against a girl, chased her, and tried to grab her rear end. Eighty percent of these gender explicit incidents were initiated by boys, although boys and girls were recipients with comparable frequency.

Responses of Teachers and Other Adults

In many of the classrooms included in the study, the teachers were assisted for at least part of the day by paraprofessionals and sometimes by parent volunteers. During lunch and recess paraprofessionals were often present, alone or along with teachers.

Responses to incidents of teasing and bullying on the part of any of these adults were recorded, since any of them could serve as arbiters of such incidents. Any intervention such as mediation or punishment was seen as involvement. However, there were times when it was clear that the teachers and other adults saw the incidents as they were occurring but chose to ignore them, and other times when it was not clear if they were choosing to ignore or actually did not see the incident. In both cases, the response was coded as "uninvolved."

Teachers and/or other adults, although present at all times, failed to become involved in 71% of the 227 incidents of teasing and bullying in which adult behavior was codable (see Figure 5). The level of adult uninvolvement remained high regardless of the gender of initiators (70% for boys; 75% for girls) or recipients (68% for boys; 75% for girls).

Male teachers and other adults played a role in 15% of the incidents recorded, which is in keeping with their proportion to female teachers and adults (16% of the teachers and adults included in the study were male). However, this was too small a group to produce any information about gender differences in adult responses.

Children's Perceptions About Teasing and Bullying

Seventy-eight interviews were conducted with children from the classrooms in which the observations were conducted. Children clearly perceived that teasing and bullying does occur. Of the 78 children interviewed, 35 boys and 29 girls (82% in total) described such incidents in response to the initial open-ended question or the follow-up question that

specifically referred to teasing and bullying.

While specific questions about gender were not included in the interview in order to avoid subtly influencing children's descriptions of events, we were able to examine the role of gender by coding the gender of initiators and recipients in the incidents that children described. Over half of these (35) identified individuals or single-gender groups as initiators and recipients in the incidents.

In a total of 22 incidents described by boy reporters, 95% identified boys as initiators. In the 13 incidents described by girls, boys were also more frequently identified as initiators, but not significantly more than girls, 54% and 46% respectively. Although the sample size was small, this difference in boys' and girls' identification of gender of initiators was significant, $\underline{X}2=8.5$, df=1, $p < .005$.

Analogously, 91% of the incidents reported by boys identified boys as recipients. Seventy-six percent of those reported by girls identified girls as the recipients. This difference in the perceptions of boys and girls was significant, $\underline{X}2=16.4$, df=1, $p < .001$.

Descriptions of gender-explicit and sexual incidents were minimal. Only one child described such an incident.

An analysis of the interviews showed that 81% of the boy reporters perceived that the teacher was looking when the incident occurred. In contrast, only 62% of girl reporters had this perception. However, both boy and girl reporters unanimously expressed a desire that teachers become involved rather than ignoring such incidents.

Responses to Staff and Parent Surveys

Sixty percent of the 30 staff members who responded to the surveys rated the issue of teasing and bullying as a serious one. However, they did not perceive gender as playing a particularly significant role in such incidents. Among the 96 parents who responded to the survey, only 31% rated teasing and bullying as a serious issue, and very few specifically perceived gender to play a role in such incidents. Other differences such as race/ethnicity, physical appearance, disability, immigrant status, or participation in the school's dual language program were also noted, albeit infrequently, as factors in such incidents by staff and parents.

CONCLUSIONS AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Research tells us that girls and boys are bombarded with messages about sex roles from birth (Andersen, 1993; Froschl, 1983; Lee and Gropper, 1974; Sprung, 1975). They learn gender-specific behaviors through toys, games, stories, clothing, room furnishings, and admonition (Andersen, 1993; Richardson, 1988; Thorne, 1994; Unger & Crawford, 1992). Moreover, their actions are interpreted differently based on what gender they are. One study asked first-time parents to describe their newborns twenty-four hours after birth. Even though the infants had no objective physical differences, parents of girls used descriptions such as delicate, weak, and inattentive, while parents of boys described their babies as large, coordinated, and alert (Rubin, Provenzano, and Luria, 1974).

Typically, our expectations for girls and boys are quite different. Even though they may be subtle and unintended, they are likely to be effective in shaping later

behavior (Anderson, 1993). We encourage girls to act nurturing and to be emotionally expressive; we are protective when they try to stretch their boundaries; and we often discourage risk-taking (Saegert & Hart, 1978). Again, subtly, or even unconsciously, boys are often encourage to act physically or aggressively (Andersen, 1993). Young children bring these socialization experiences to all their interactions with peers including interactions that can be defined as teasing and bullying.

We found that gender plays a subtle and potentially important role in children's teasing and bullying behavior. The most salient finding was that boys initiated more than three times as many direct forms of teasing and bullying as girls. It is interesting to note, however, that in fact boys and girls are "equal opportunity initiators." That is, there was a comparable number of boy and girl recipients, regardless of whether the initiator was male or female. Nonetheless, the fact remains that both boys and girls are teased and bullied more by boys. This finding is in keeping with the research on bullying conducted by Olweus and others, reviewed earlier in this article, and as we have found, does not go unnoticed by young children. In our interviews, boys reported and girls tended to agree that boys do most of the initiating. In the words of one Kindergartner: "Boys usually chase girls, because that's what boys do--boys chase."

In this study, both boys and girls were more physical than verbal in their initiation of incidents, but a difference was observed in the responses of the recipients. Boys were more physical in responding to other boys, while girls more verbal in responding to boys. For example:

> One boy went up to a second boy and said in a loud voice close to his face, "What's up?" The second boy used his arm to brush the first boy aside, then pushed him. The first boy pushed him back, then each kneed the other in the crotch.
>
> While seated at desks, a boy repeatedly tapped a girl on the back with a piece of cardboard. She turned around and asked him to stop.

We do not regard these results as an indication that "boys are bad," but rather that we must do a much better job of addressing aggressive behavior in young boys to counteract the prevailing messages they receive from the media and society in general.

In keeping with prior research on bullying, we also found that there was a consistent lack of teacher and other adult intervention in teasing and bullying behavior. Furthermore, from our interviews with children, we know that children yearn for adults to intervene. For example, children told interviewers that:

"Teachers should make kids explain and make them apologize."
"Teachers should explain the rules."
"Teachers don't do anything."
"Kids won't stop until the teacher makes them."

Teachers and other adults present in schools may fail to intervene in incidents of teasing and bullying for a variety of reasons. They may be unaware of the incident, they may want children to work things out on their own, they may want to discourage tattling

behavior or they may even feel that this is a natural part of childhood. However, when teachers do not intervene, which was true in the majority of incidents we observed, it is conceivable that children perceive that this is condoning teasing and bullying behavior. Since boys are the predominant initiators of these incidents, children may also see teachers' lack of response as giving boys license to behave in these ways. In the interviews, children's prevailing sense that teachers are indeed watching these incidents occur may serve as further support for the interpretation that such behavior is acceptable.

The educational implications that can be drawn from this study point to the subtle but potentially important role that teasing and bullying play in young children's sex-role socialization. If boys do most of the initiating and adults typically fail to intervene, this may lead both boys and girls to assume that this behavior is condoned. The unanimous desire for adult intervention on the part of both boys and girls challenges all of us to acknowledge this cry for intervention. Yet teachers and parents do not seem to perceive that gender plays a significant role in these inicidents. This undoubtedly leads to repeated missed opportunities for adults to help children develop more positive relationships with opposite sex peers in the short run. In the long run, it can contribute to more pernicious behavior including sexual harassment.

Another important implication of this study is that teachers and parents have a crucial role to play in helping to change the school environment so that teasing and bullying are not so prevalent in the early elementary grades and children see adults as active participants in its abatement rather than condoning it through their failure to intervene. Teachers and other school staff (administrators, paraprofessionals, school aides) as well as parents can be trained to take a proactive stance, understanding that their attitudes and behaviors will be perceived by children as decisive factors in preventing teasing and bullying. In addition, intervention in teasing and bullying behavior will affect what children learn about "acceptable" gender roles in school settings and beyond. By directly addressing teasing and bullying in the early grades, as well as the subtle role of gender in this phenomenon, school personnel and parents have the opportunity to create a more prosocial climate in general, and positive interactions between girls and boys in particular.

Figure 1. Gender of initiators in observed incidents of teasing and bullying, N=231, Z=10.3, p<.001

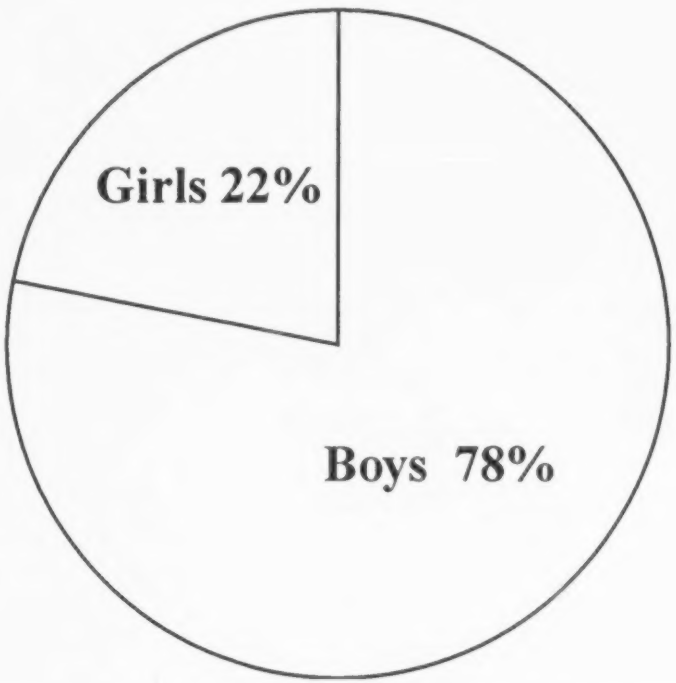
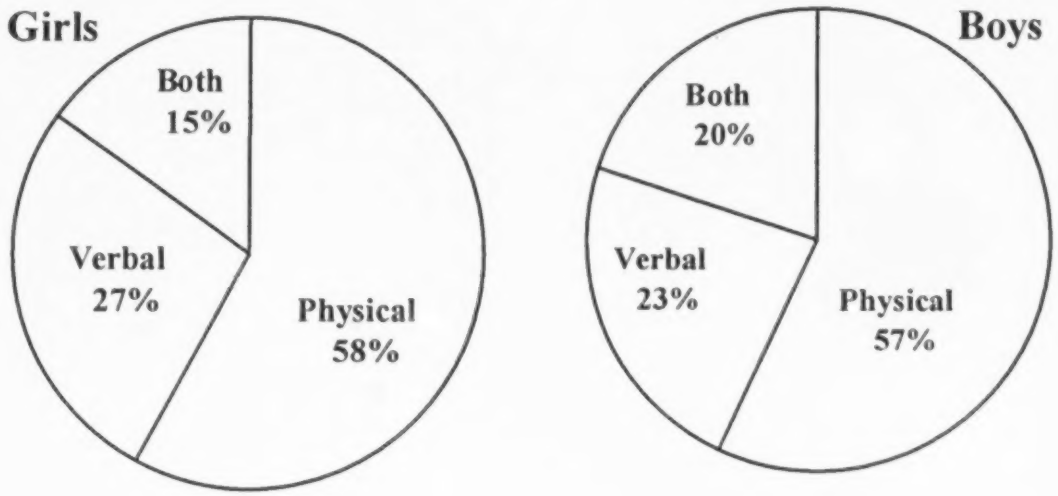


Figure 2. Gender of recipients in incidents of teasing and bullying, N=231.

Figure 3. Behavior of boy and girl initiators in incidents of teasying and bullying.



N=45, p<.01 N=181, p<.01

Figure 4. Behavior of boy and girl recipients in response to incidents initiated by boys.

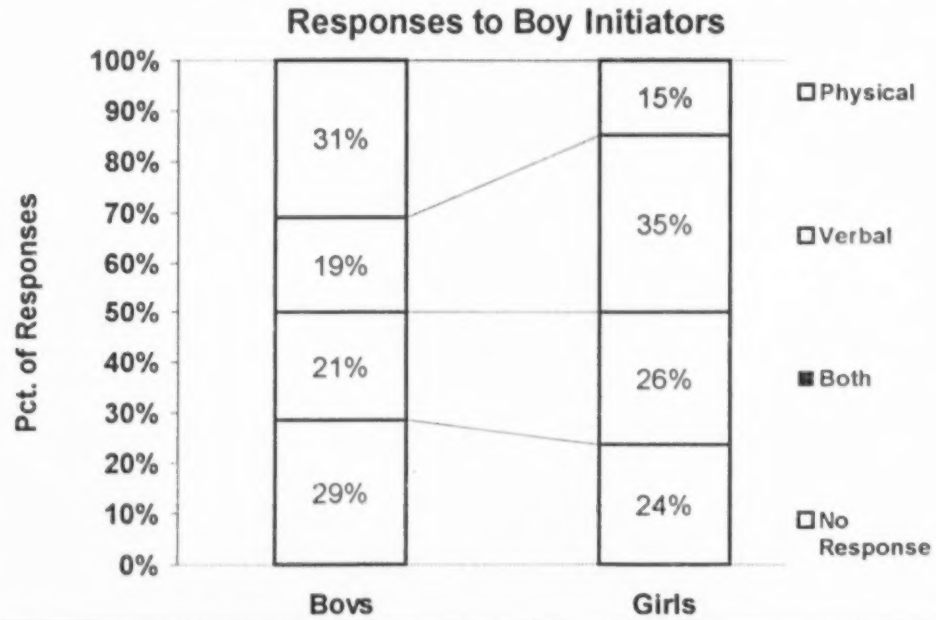
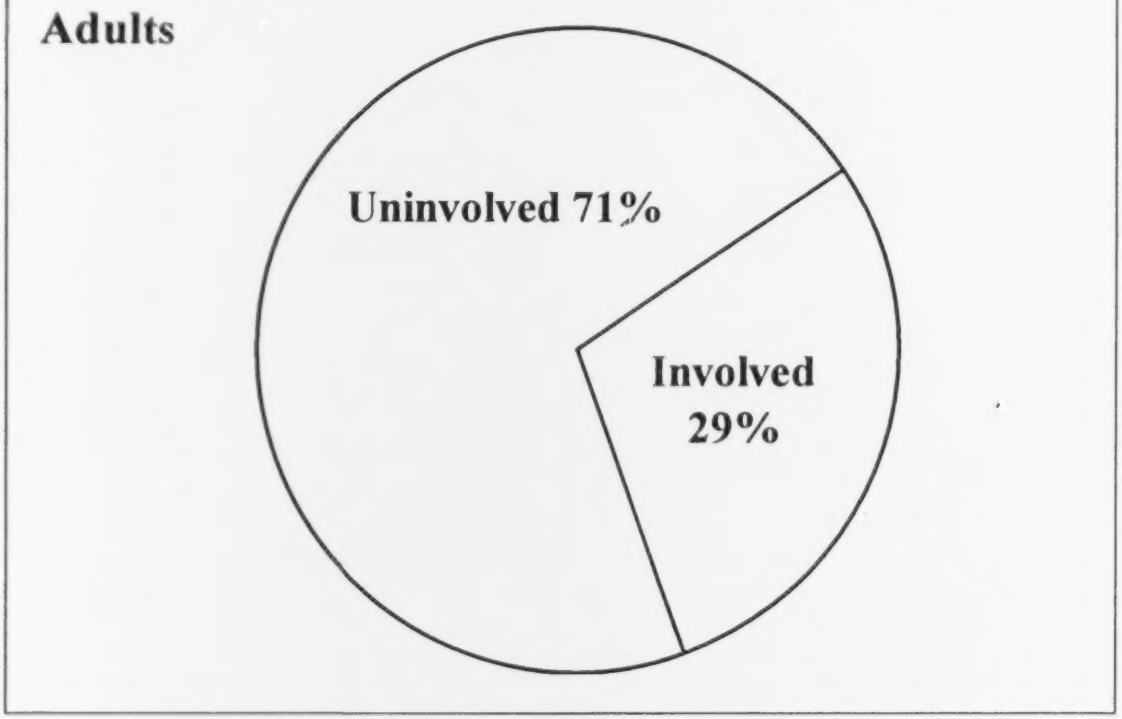


Figure 5. Level of adult intervention in incidents of teasing and bullying, N=227, $p<.01$



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